

## From the Commander...

Every four years the citizens of our great nation enjoy a privilege provided by our forefathers and defended by generations of American patriots—namely, the right to collectively choose our president, the world's most influential leader. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, amid national celebration, we will witness a peaceful transfer of executive leadership that is unheard of in most countries. And, as the world watches, The United States Air Force Band will be there. Perhaps the most anticipated event of the inauguration is the traditional parade led by the newly-sworn-in president of the United States of America. As the procession makes its way down Pennsylvania Avenue from the U.S. Capitol to the White House, a 99-member marching contingent, drawn from almost every unit of the Band, will proudly take its place in this historic event. Later in the day, smaller ensembles will serenade partygoers at official inaugural balls and related events throughout the Washington, D.C. area. It will truly be an honor for each member of our organization to represent the Air Force and the nation during this remarkable expression of our democratic process.

Readers of this column are undoubtedly aware of my continuing discussion of how The USAF Band sends messages of influence through its music and professionalism. Recently we had an amazing opportunity to do this at the international level, right here in Hangar II, when General Yu Yongbo, director of the People's Liberation Army, Political Department of the People's Republic of China paid a visit to The USAF Band. A self-proclaimed music aficionado, General Yu specifically requested to tour our facility and meet the members of the Band. The fact that General Yu holds a position in China equivalent to our country's vice president sheds light on the significance of this event. After briefing him on the Band's operation and mission, we treated him to a performance by The Air Force Strings as

well as the Concert Band and Singing Sergeants. We paid tribute to his nation with a rendition of a well-known Chinese march and then shared a bit of our own musical heritage by playing *My Country 'Tis of Thee*. As I conducted the final strain of the medley, with the lyrics, "we shall be free," I was struck by the magnitude of this moment, and was reminded once again of the power of music to transcend barriers of language and ideology.

In parting, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to three members of our organization who are retiring after many years of dedicated service to The USAF Band. Chief Master Sergeants Donna Abaira, manager of the Singing Sergeants; Dana Steinhauer, director of Public Affairs; and Robert Deitemeyer, director of Music Production have collectively served for over 75 years and have been instrumental in shaping the Band into the world-class musical organization that it is today. The positive impact that each of these members has made during their tenure will be felt for many years to come. Please join me in wishing them the very best as they enjoy the next phase of their lives.



*Lowell E. Graham*

Lowell E. Graham, Colonel, USAF  
Commander/Conductor

## Brass Biz

The Ceremonial Brass has the awesome duty of honoring our nation's service members by giving musical support to funeral services at Arlington National Cemetery. On November 17, the Brass honored a very special person to the U.S. Air Force, when we performed at the funeral of A1C John L. Levitow. Levitow was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his extreme heroism during a mission in the Vietnam War. He was the most junior ranking airman and one out of only 16 enlisted members ever to receive this award. Levitow's name has become synonymous with the Air Force core value of *service before self*. We feel privileged to have been involved with this most solemn of duties.

Several Ceremonial Brass members participated in a Chamber Players concert on Thursday, December 7, at Harmony Hall

Regional Center in Fort Washington, Maryland. The performance featured MSgt Gil Corella, who conducted as well as played tuba. Joining Sergeant Corella were trumpeters MSgts Robert Cheal, William Adcock, Sean Walsh and TSgt Michael Huff; hornists MSgt Anthony Hagan and TSgts Tara Smith and Kent Baker; trombonists MSgt Susan Chumley and TSgt Michael Piersol; euphoniumist TSgt Jennifer Dayton; and tubist MSgt Albert Islas.

MSgt Jari Villanueva was the speaker at a dinner held in his honor by the Strong Vincent Society in Erie, Pennsylvania on November 9. He spoke about Strong Vincent, the Colonel of the 83rd PA Volunteers, and his bugler Oliver Willcox Norton. On the November 11, MSgt Villanueva was the main speaker at the Veterans Day ceremony at the Armed Forces Reserve

Center/ VA Medical Center in Erie. During the ceremony, he was presented the Key to the City by the mayor of Erie. A guest appearance on radio station WLKK and a performance at a local church rounded out a very successful Veterans Day weekend in northwest Pennsylvania. MSgt Villanueva was also featured in a story about the Civil War Living Histories, in which he participated over the summer at Arlington National Cemetery. The story can be found on [www.defenselink.mil](http://www.defenselink.mil). Sergeant Villanueva was also featured on WTOP radio in November.

Additionally, we want to bid farewell MSgt Villanueva. After being a valuable part of the Ceremonial Brass for many years, he will move to the Music Production staff. We wish him well in his future endeavors.

--TSgt Tara Smith